

Remarks of Vincenza Mazzone-McNulty
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Before the Program Review and Investigations Committee & Education Committee
February 27, 2008

Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee and the Program Review and Investigations Committee. I am here today to comment on Raised Bill 329 and Raised Bill 330 pertaining to the BEST program.

My name is Vincenza Mazzone- McNulty. I am a World Language educator at Joel Barlow High School in Redding, CT. I am in my thirty-fourth year of teaching. I have served as a cooperating teacher, an assessor, a mentor, the facilitator for the BEST team in my school, a portfolio scorer, and a seminar presenter in the BEST program from 1989 to the present. I have just completed my update mentor training as of October 2007.

I am here today to support the various recommendations made by the Program Review and Investigations Committee, the CEA (Connecticut Education Association) and the teachers who testified at the PRC hearing in September 2007. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you again to share my professional and personal reflections about the BEST program, in particular the mentoring component.

There are several recommendations addressing the importance of the mentoring component to the BEST program that support new teachers through the induction and licensing process. First, it is imperative that new teachers "receive formal mentoring " support for the first two years of their teaching experience. Under the current program a new teacher is assigned a mentor for the first year only. My district has always expected and supported a two-year commitment on the part of the mentor, especially since the second year is the time when the portfolio requirement occurs. I have formally mentored two teachers, as well as supported many others as a member of the BEST team. I've also assisted other teachers outside my district who didn't have a formal mentor for their

portfolio year. I have seen first hand, and believe, that two years of support produce better teachers who deliver better instruction to the students of Connecticut.

For the first year the mentor assists the beginning teacher in various ways, from procuring supplies, how to access services for their students, fine tuning lesson design, as well as providing meaningful feedback when observing a class. The mentor and the new teacher develop a professional relationship that is based on trust. Often times the first year teacher, with the advice and support of their mentor, will select the unit they will feature in their portfolio the following year. During the second year the mentor continues to help the new teacher in all the above-mentioned ways, as well as assist them with the planning, implementation, and editing of their portfolio. Observing the portfolio process as it unfolds and critiquing the reflection and the entire document help increase the quality of this most important professional work.

Another recommendation that is valuable is to for the State Department of Education to "standardize the frequency with which beginning teachers and their mentors/mentor teams are required to meet." This will assure that new teachers will benefit from similar support regardless of the district where they teach. When I served as a mentor I met with my mentee whenever we could or as frequently as was needed. Our meetings happened before and after school, on weekends at the local diner, or during a planning period if we happened to have common planning time .We were required to keep a log of our work sessions that was submitted to the district facilitator in May or June. This provided ample evidence of what the mentor and beginning teacher had accomplished as well as how much growth and learning had occurred.

Speaking of the amount of time needed to be an effective mentor, there is also a recommendation that suggests that the district "require a reduced classroom teaching workload for BEST mentors as determined by the school district. This reduced load should "coincide with a beginning teacher's daily preparation time." If the mentor teaches fewer classes, there is much more time available to observe the new teacher's classes on a regular basis, to process and provide meaningful feedback about good

teaching practice, as well as time to develop and implement lessons and activities that maximize student learning. The mentor also has more time available to assist with the preparation and critique the beginning teacher's portfolio.

In order for the districts to provide a reduced class load for the mentor, the state must provide funds to hire the additional teachers to teach the class/ classes the mentor will not be doing while they are serving as a mentor. At Joel Barlow. I carried a full teaching load of five classes and a duty assignment while I was a mentor. As I have previously stated I met often with my mentee. This was a challenge for me but I believed it was my responsibility to do whatever was helpful and supportive to my mentee. However, there were times when the district would provide a substitute for one of my classes to observe a particular class that my mentee was teaching. I was then able to provide specific feedback on the lesson design and any other aspect of the teaching learning process I had observed that day. If I had a reduced teaching load this would have made it easier to work with my mentee during the school day or after school and not have to squeeze in our work together late in the day, nights or weekends.

There is one final recommendation about mentoring that I wish to discuss. Beginning teachers must be supported by a mentor who is currently teaching, or with recent experience, in the same content area or grade level. Matching the new teacher with a mentor who has a similar assignment offers the most meaningful support to the beginning teacher. The new teacher can ask poignant questions and observe the mentor's classes. Their dialogue enriches both of them and is specific to the needs of the beginning teacher. Their students also benefit from two teachers planning and delivering high quality instruction.

In conclusion, I ask you to fully support the recommendations and changes to the mentoring component of the BEST program that have been presented in the legislative program review committee's report and supported by CEA. Mentoring is key to the success of the BEST program. This positive support of the induction process for teachers will lead to optimum instruction for teachers and students. Although there are

time and cost factors attached to these recommendations, in the long run they will prove to be cost effective, efficient, and lead to the children of Connecticut being taught by competent professionals held accountable by high standards to the state and local boards of education who have earned the public's trust. Thank you for your time, attention, and dedication to this important educational issue for the teachers and students of Connecticut.